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ABSTRACT

Stage 2 of an evaluation assessed the impact of changes to the United Kingdom's national funding rules to include 3- and 6-hour information and communications technology (ICT) courses. Fieldwork consisted of a questionnaire to colleges, postal survey of learners, visits to colleges, and analysis of the national student database for 2000-2001. Findings indicated much higher proportions of older learners and young people from minority ethnic groups than is normal on other courses. Evidence showed these courses attract "new learners." About 10 percent of enrollees on these courses had basic skills needs. The aspect of the course learners were most likely to praise was support from tutors, while the aspect provoking most negative comments was a lack of individual attention. Learners described a variety of benefits from their courses that fell into three broad categories: they gained the confidence to go on to learn something else; they learned something specific, such as a new skill; and they had a generally positive experience that was informative, interesting, or fun. About half the learners who enrolled on short ICT courses progressed to another ICT course. Courses fell into three categories: "tasters"; introductory; and those with much more specific aims. Appendixes include Stage 1 summary of findings and key issues, learners comments, and college questionnaire. (YLB)

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learning and skills development agency

Evaluation of 3- and 6-hour courses

Stage 2

Jenny Kirk and Gordon Kirk

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learning
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Evaluation of 3- and 6-hour courses

Stage 2

Jenny Kirk and
Gordon Kirk

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A note for the busy reader

We recognise that you may not have time to read this report in full. We have therefore incorporated the following features: –

- **Section 1** is an executive summary
- **Section 9** summarises our main findings, the implications for stakeholders, and areas where further research would be useful
- Key points are summarised in a shaded box at the end of other sections.

In addition, you may not have read the Stage 1 report[1], which was published in March 2001. Therefore the main findings and key issues from that report are summarised in **Annexes 1 and 2**.

1 Kirk G, Kirk J, Fletcher M and Vorhaus J. *Evaluation of 3- and 6-hour courses*. Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2001.

1 Executive summary

Introduction

This is the second of two reports evaluating the impact of the introduction of funding for FE courses of 3 or 6 hours in length ('short courses'). In Stage 1 of our work, which was published in March 2001 and is summarised in Annexes 1 and 2, we found that short courses (especially short ICT courses) attracted many people who would not have enrolled on a longer course, and that such courses had a valuable role to play in introducing people to learning. We also gave evidence that institutions were reporting that a significant proportion of learners on ICT short courses had basic skills needs. This second report investigates these issues further. The fieldwork was carried out in late 2001 and early 2002, and consisted of a questionnaire to colleges, a postal survey of learners, visits to colleges and analysis of the national student database for 2000/01.

Profile of learners

There were 174,512 enrolments on short ICT courses in 2000/01, a large number for the first full year of the initiative. Institutions see the courses as an important and integral part of their course portfolio. The age profile of learners shows much higher proportions of older learners than is normal on other courses. Men over 60 are four times more likely to enrol on a short ICT course than on other courses, and women over 60 three times more likely. These courses are also more likely to attract young people from minority ethnic groups, especially young men. Twenty per cent of the learners aged between 16 and 18 were from minority ethnic groups, whereas only 10% of that age group in the population as a whole is from a minority ethnic group.

'New learners'

There is considerable evidence that these courses attract 'new learners', although the lack of a consistent definition of newness makes it difficult to be precise. About three-quarters of all learners were described as 'new' by their college, but sometimes this meant that they were new to that college, or even just new to IT. We are confident that short courses play a very important role in introducing people to new learning.

Basic skills needs

Overall, about 10% of the people enrolling on these courses appear to have basic skills needs, however defined or measured. If a more formal assessment was carried out, which sought to assess learners' skill levels against given levels in the basic skills core curriculum, the proportion may well be higher. It is clear that most people feel more comfortable to 'admit' that they need support to learn about IT than about literacy or numeracy. For this reason it is important that institutions recognise that a significant number of people with basic skills needs will present themselves as ICT learners. There are a number of important implications in terms of course design and delivery, many of which raise issues of staff development. Front-line or reception staff have an important role to play in making informal assessments of learners' skill levels, and institutions need to consider how to provide support in learning centres for learners with basic skills needs. There will be some settings (eg a one-off class in a community setting) where it is much more difficult, or impossible, to provide such support during a class, so referral arrangements are also important.

Learners' perceptions

In general, learners were positive about their courses, with 75% rating them as 'excellent' or 'good'. The aspect of the course they were most likely to praise was support from tutors, whereas the aspect provoking most negative comments was a lack of individual attention. It is clear that the level and quality of personal support received is the most important factor for most learners. Other aspects that attracted criticism were faulty or inadequate equipment and course descriptions that had not been sufficiently clear about course content.

Learners described a variety of benefits from their courses. These fell into three broad categories. First, learners often talked about gaining the confidence to go on to learn something else. Second, they felt they had learned something specific, such as a new skill. Third, they described a generally positive experience that was informative, interesting or fun. Learners' comments are reproduced in full in **Annex 3**.

Progression

About half the learners who enrolled on short ICT courses progressed to another ICT course, usually at a higher level. Among learners who rated their short course as 'poor', the progression rate was only 17% – learners' perceptions of their first taste of learning are crucial in determining whether or not they continue.

Learning environment

The courses are offered in a range of settings, although we did not encounter as many in very non-traditional venues (such as pubs or supermarkets) as in Stage 1. Some colleges are making considerable efforts to establish local learning centres, aimed at widening participation; and many are offering taster courses in community settings. These modern centres can offer an excellent learning environment, far removed from a 'classroom' experience, and can act as excellent community facilities. Many colleges are also offering short courses in larger learning centres on main college sites, although the courses are usually run as separate taught groups even in this setting. Where this is not the case, and learners 'drop in' for their short course alongside other learners, there is some evidence that they are more likely to be dissatisfied and feel that they were left to their own devices. It is important that funding levels for short courses enable providers to staff them generously.

Classification of courses

The courses fall into three broad categories. There are true 'tasters', designed to increase confidence in using a computer; 'introductory' courses designed to prepare learners for progression to, say, computing for beginners or a specific qualification like Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT); and courses with much more specific aims, such as 'How to use a scanner' or 'Introduction to the internet.' Colleges that had thought carefully about the precise aims of their short courses were better able to offer a comprehensive range of short courses to suit a wide range of learners. Most courses were offered free of charge, although fees were levied in some cases for courses in the third category above.

Learning materials

Learning materials vary considerably, but in general, were of a high standard. We saw some first-class examples of clear, colourful and lively individual workbooks that had been

designed to take account of learners with basic skills. All learners liked such materials, since they provided clear instructions, used simple jargon-free language and made good use of diagrams and other graphics. The best examples also included a clear course outline, with learning outcomes, and enabled learners to produce something specific during their course. Colleges that had conducted a formal review of their short courses were far more likely to have recognised the needs of a wide range of learners and adapted their courses to take account of this.

Staffing arrangements

There is a high degree of flexibility in staff contracts to enable learning centres to operate at hours to suit learners (typically 9am–9pm on weekdays and for a shorter period at the weekend). The boundaries between tutors, support staff and administrators are increasingly blurred. The person who is the first point of contact for learners, whether they are a receptionist, centre manager or tutor, has a vital role to play in helping to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for new learners. Many staff working with learners on short courses had been chosen for their 'people skills' and their ability to provide high levels of personal support for learners. A key requirement for all staff involved with short ICT courses is a high level of awareness of basic skills needs so that learners with such needs can be identified and supported. This has major implications for staff development for many providers.

2 Introduction

Background

1 This is the second of two reports evaluating the impact of the introduction of funding for FE courses of 3 or 6 hours in length ('short courses'). The first report, published in March 2001 (hereafter 'Stage 1'), considered the overall impact of this change in the funding rules: we profiled the learners who had been attracted to the courses; we asked providers what they thought of the initiative; we looked at how it had been implemented; and we considered the implications for future provision. A summary of findings from Stage 1 is provided as **Annex 1**, and a summary of key emerging issues is provided as **Annex 2**.

2 Key findings from Stage 1 include:

- very short courses appeared to attract many people who would not have enrolled on a longer course
- many of the 'taster' courses had an intrinsic value in introducing people to learning
- ICT courses were successful in recruiting large numbers of learners, but this was not the case in any other curriculum area, including basic skills
- many providers reported that a significant proportion of the learners who enrolled on ICT courses had basic skills needs.

3 The second report investigates these issues further. Focusing on ICT courses, we assess the impact of changes to the national funding rules so as to include 3- and 6-hour ICT courses. In particular, we examine the following questions:

- what are the characteristics of learners attracted to short ICT courses? (Who are they, and what do they want?)
- what is the evidence regarding the skill levels of these learners, in particular their basic skill needs?
- how satisfied were learners with their short courses?
- to what extent did learners progress to other courses, and to which courses did they progress ?
- what are the implications for policy-makers, funding bodies, providers and tutors?

Methodology

4 The material in this report comes from various sources.

- Further analysis of the information gathered during Stage 1.
- Analysis of data relating to learners enrolled on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses, taken from the national Individualised Student Record (ISR) database.
- A questionnaire to a sample of 43 institutions that had enrolled learners on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses in the academic year 2000/01 and in the first few weeks of 2001/02 (attached as **Annex 6**). Twenty-one of these were involved in Stage 1, and 22 new institutions were chosen to provide a bigger sample with the same characteristics in terms of geographic spread, size and widening participation factor. The 15 replies received included information about approximately 10,000 learners.
- Testimony from senior managers, IT centre managers, tutors and, in some cases, learners at a sample of six of these 15 colleges. Two of these had been visited in Stage 1, and four were from the extended sample. Testimony was gathered through structured interviews conducted by the researchers during these field visits.
- A postal survey of 1007 learners enrolled on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses (attached as **Annex 7**). Replies were received from 139 learners.
- Involvement with two basic skills Pathfinder projects.

Funding

5 In spring 2000, the Further Education Funding Council for England (FEFC) announced some new funding arrangements for adult learners, including funding for courses of just 3 or 6 hours in length. They were designed to benefit adults who may not have had access to FEFC-funded provision before, perhaps because of their backgrounds or experience. The target group also included those described as 'technologically disadvantaged', who may not have had the opportunity to develop ICT skills.

6 The courses themselves fell into in three categories: basic skills; information and communications technology (ICT); and other short courses for adults with a primary objective of progression to further education, training or gaining employment skills.

7 These arrangements were embedded into the funding methodologies for 2000/01 and 2001/02 (when the responsibility for funding passed to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)), and it is reasonable to assume that short courses will continue to attract funding in the future.

8 In Stage 1, we summarised the two key aims of the original initiative as attracting **new learners** into courses that would provide **progression** opportunities, and we assessed the extent to which these aims were being achieved. This report develops that assessment further and includes an extra dimension about learners with basic skill needs.

9 In summer 2001, the 'Bitesize' initiative was launched, involving a programme of free taster courses lasting 1–2 hours. Adults were invited, through national publicity, to 'turn

up, join in and move on', and employers were encouraged to organise tasters in the workplace. Certificates were issued to all participants and a short evaluation questionnaire was issued. Bitesize was the subject of a national evaluation and is being repeated in 2002.

3 The learners

10 Most of the information in this section is taken from an analysis of the Individualised Student Record (ISR) database of FE enrolments. ISR20 is the source, which includes all enrolments for the academic year 2000/01. Thanks are extended to the LSC for access to this information, and for their help in analysing it. Note that these figures refer to *enrolments* rather than learners – if someone enrols on two courses, this is counted as two enrolments.

Totals

11 There were ***174,512 enrolments on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses in 2000/01***. Eighty-four per cent were in general FE or tertiary colleges. **Table A** shows the distribution.

Table A

Type of institution	Number of enrolments on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses	Number of institutions reporting 3- and 6- hour ICT enrolments	Mean number of 3- and 6-hour ICT enrolments per institution
General FE/tertiary college	145,841	222	657
Sixth form college	5,181	36	144
Specialist college	1,887	14	135
External institution	21,305	80	266
Specialist designated institution	298	2	149
Totals	**174,512**	**354**	**493**

12 By any measure, this is a significant number of enrolments, confirming the testimony from institutions that these courses are popular. Further evidence of the attraction of short courses is provided by the evaluation of the 2001 'Bitesize' initiative, which attracted 70,000 enrolments (in a wide range of curriculum areas) over a four-week period.

Age and gender

13 Three per cent of learners did not put their date of birth on their enrolment form. **Table B** shows the percentage breakdown of the remainder:

Table B

	Female	Male	Total
% under 19 (ie 16–18)	2	2	2
% 19–59	76	66	73
% 60 and over	21	31	25

(Columns may not add to 100% because of rounding)

14 This confirms the Stage 1 findings, and anecdotal evidence from centres visited, that short ICT courses are attractive to older learners, and particularly to older men. About 27% of the adult population is over 60, but ISR data shows that only 7% of all post-19 part-time students are over 60. ***So these short courses are three or four times more attractive to older learners than the average course.***

15 The college questionnaire asked for information about age in more detail. The overall picture of the 10,000 enrolments at the responding colleges (see **Tables C** and **D**) is similar to that above, but perhaps shows even more clearly the extent to which these courses attracted older learners:

Table C: Females

Age	16–19	20–24	25–34	35–49	50–64	65+
%	2	6	17	36	27	12

Table D: Males

Age	16–19	20–24	25–34	35–49	50–64	65+
%	2	4	14	32	29	19

Ethnic origin

16 19% of learners did not put their ethnic origin on their enrolment form. **Table E** shows the percentage breakdown of the remainder:

Table E

Ethnic origin	**%**
Bangladeshi	0.2
Black African	0.9
Black Caribbean	1.2
Black Other	0.5
Chinese	0.4
Indian	1.7
Pakistani	0.8
White	92.3
Other - Asian	0.7
Other	1.3
Total	**100**

17 In Stage 1, we reported similar figures (6% of the learners were from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to 7.7% above). We noted that the corresponding figure for all part-time learners over 19 was 12%, and said that the difference may reflect the older age profile of the learners, but that this issue needed further analysis. We are now able to provide that analysis.

18 It is necessary to recognise that the ethnic profile of the population differs across age-bands. For example, the Office for National Statistics provides the following estimates for

2000 for the UK, based on the census and the Labour Force Survey (**Table F**):

Table F

	<16	16–34	35–64	65+	All age groups
% White	89	91	94	98	93
% All other ethnic groups	11	9	6	2	7

19 Hence the key to determining whether any group of enrolments is representative of the population (or whether it was attractive to any group of the population) is to analyse, as far as possible, the ethnic profile by age-group and compare it with figures derived from those in the table above. When that is done with the enrolments on the 3- and 6-hour ICT courses, the results are as shown in **Table G**:

Table G

Age group	% of enrolments from minority ethnic groups			% of that age group in the population from minority ethnic groups
	Female	Male	Total	
Under 19 (ie 16–18)	16	25	20	10
19–59	8	11	9	7
60 and over	2	3	3	3

20 Hence we can conclude that ***young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to enrol on short ICT courses than their white counterparts This is particularly true for young men***. For older people, there appears to be no such marked difference.

The widening participation factor

21 The ISR records whether an enrolment qualifies for the 'widening participation uplift'. This provides additional funding under a number of different circumstances. Learners living in deprived areas (defined through postcode), learners on basic skills courses, and learners with disadvantaged backgrounds (eg homeless, ex-offenders) may qualify. **Table H** shows the widening participation status of the 174,512 enrolments on the 3- and 6-hour ICT courses was:

Table H

Widening participation category	% of enrolments
Not eligible	71
From deprived area	16
Studying basic skills programme	8
Supported by other funding (eg European Social Fund, Single Regeneration Budget)	4
Disadvantaged background	1

22 Aggregated ISR data was not available at the time of writing to enable comparisons to

be made with FE courses as a whole.

23 In the questionnaire, colleges were asked how many new learners came from areas with 'widening participation' postcodes. Not all colleges were able to supply this information, and the responses from those that did ranged from zero to 77%, although half the responses were in the range 0%–10%. It is clear that some colleges are targeting deprived areas by siting new centres in them, or by using community facilities.

Fees

24 Colleges can choose whether or not to charge fees for these short courses. We reported in Stage 1 that most took the view that a taster course designed to attract new learners should be free. A smaller number levied a small fee because they felt that learners would value the course more, and because they had experienced people booking places on free courses but not turning up. Also, colleges are more likely to charge a fee for courses about specific skills or a piece of software, than for genuine introductory courses. If a fee is charged, the college does, nevertheless, have to waive the fee for some learners (those on receipt of means-tested benefit, for example). In the Stage 1 work, we reported that just 18% of learners were paying fees on the ICT tasters. This general pattern has continued into 2000/01. The position can be summarised as shown in **Table I**.

Table I

Fee status	% of enrolments
Course is free to all	73
Fees paid	20
Fees waived for those eligible	7

These figures confirm the Stage 1 findings. In the Stage 2 fieldwork, we found no examples where colleges were charging for genuine 'tasters' or for general introductory courses. All the courses that had fees attached involved learning to use a specific piece of equipment or software.

Key points

- Short ICT courses are offered by most institutions and attract significant numbers of learners.
- They are particularly attractive to older learners, especially older men.
- They are also attractive to young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, especially young men.
- Four-fifths of the learners paid no fees.

4 'New' learners

25 By definition, widening participation involves attracting so-called 'new learners'. In Stage 1, there was strong testimonial evidence from staff at the centres visited that many of the people enrolling on short ICT courses were 'new', but it was clear that this had a variety of meanings. It might mean that this was the first course attended since leaving school; that it was the first enrolment recorded at that particular college; or simply that it was the first time that that person had undertaken an IT course.

26 Therefore in the questionnaire, colleges were asked how they defined 'new' learners. The results were as shown in **Table J**.

Table J

Definition	% of colleges using this definition
New to the institution	40%
New to IT	40%
Nothing studied during the last 3 years	13%
Nothing studied since leaving compulsory education	7%

27 To a large extent, these results reflect the information collected from learners during enrolment and the capacity of colleges to manipulate their data. Usually it is relatively easy for a college to determine whether a learner has enrolled at that college before – and if so, what course they followed. Unless citizens are allocated a unique identification number which enables tracking of their learning routes between institutions, it will be difficult to collect firm information about the extent to which they move between providers, although it may be possible to interrogate the ISR database locally if all providers agree. This is a difficult issue. We are aware that the Basic Skills Pathfinder Projects originally planned to use National Insurance numbers to track learners, but this has not been implemented for a number of reasons, including concerns about data protection and confidentiality.

28 Given the current emphasis on widening participation, it is surprising that only one college in the sample appears to collect, at enrolment, information about whether the learner is genuinely 'new' (ie in the fourth category in the table above). It would certainly be useful in assessing the impact of initiatives such as this if this was introduced as a compulsory field in the ISR and its successor database.

29 The questionnaire went on to ask how many of the learners enrolled on the 3- and 6-hour ICT courses were 'new', according to the institution's own definition. The result, based on about 10,000 learners at the 15 responding colleges, was that 72% of those enrolled were new learners. Irrespective of the caveats that arise because of the different definitions used, it seems clear therefore that these courses are attracting large numbers of people who are new to adult learning, who have had a long break since their last learning episode, or who are learning IT for the first time. Short courses appear to be successful in attracting people to a learning experience that is new to them.

Key points

- Research in this area is hampered by the lack of consistent definitions or systems.
- Short courses appear to be very successful in attracting people to new learning.

5 Basic skills needs

30 In Stage 1, we reported that although the 3- and 6-hour basic skills courses had not recruited large numbers of learners (perhaps because similar provision was already in place), many institutions were reporting that significant numbers of learners enrolling on short ICT courses had basic skills needs. This significant finding was one of the main triggers for this second stage of research.

31 The period since the first report has seen an increased national focus on basic skills, through initiatives such as the Pathfinder Projects, part of the overall 'Skills for Life' strategy. This has resulted in more local activity and an increasing awareness of the need to bring a wide range of perspectives to this important problem. Increasingly, colleges are being encouraged to regard basic skills as a cross-college issue, which should involve teachers of all subjects, not just basic skills specialists. This has implications for staff development, course design, initial guidance and many other areas of activity. There are many parallels with the debate about key skills for the 14–19 age group.

32 One of the areas of debate is about how to attract people with basic skills needs into learning, and it is now generally accepted that people are far more likely to 'own up' to not knowing anything about using a computer, than to say that they have difficulty with reading, writing or numbers. One often hears the view s that there is less 'stigma' attached. Many people also believe that competence in information technology is the key to getting a job or getting a different job, so are highly motivated to learn ICT.

33 Current research (draft LSDA report on 'Recognising and validating learners' achievement in non-accredited basic skills and ESOL') draws attention to several issues that are directly relevant to the short ICT courses:

- the importance of dividing learning into 'bite-size chunks' in order to ensure success and thereby motivate learners
- adult literacy is increasingly delivered in the context of other learning
- courses designed to attract new learners often link basic skills learning with the learning of another skill.

34 For several reasons, therefore – public attitudes, learner motivation, course design and delivery – ***the short ICT courses are an appropriate context in which to examine a number of basic skills issues***. In this section of the report, we set out the evidence from the ISR data, from our questionnaire and survey and from our college visits.

ISR data

35 Eight per cent of the 174,512 enrolments on the short ICT courses qualified for a 'widening participation uplift' because they were classified as being on a basic skills programme. This presumably means that these courses, which had ICT qualification aims, were specifically designed for people with basic skills needs – they might, for example, have been delivered to an existing group of learners. In terms of trying to answer the question 'How many learners on short ICT courses had basic skills needs?', this 8% figure probably represents the absolute minimum.

College questionnaire

36 Colleges were asked how many of their learners on short ICT courses had basic skills needs. There was a very wide of responses – from 'nil' to 'most'. Clearly the response depends on how such needs are defined, and indeed on whether they are identified. The overall average across the responding colleges was that ***10% of the learners had basic skills needs***.

College visits

37 This question was explored in some detail with college staff. Once again, as in Stage 1, many ***staff spoke about significant numbers of people with basic skills needs*** on their short ICT courses. This even occurred at one of the colleges that had given the response 'nil' on the questionnaire – it transpired that short ICT courses were run at two separate sites of the college and the information provided in response to the questionnaire referred to one site only. The other site contained an ICT learning centre that was next door to a drop-in basic skills centre, and there was evidence of considerable linkage between the two so that specialist basic skills staff could support learners in the ICT learning centre.

38 Forty per cent of colleges, in response to the questionnaire, said that all learners were screened for basic skills needs, with a further 23% saying they used other methods of identifying needs. These claims were not borne out during our visits. Although most colleges had systems in place for assessment and screening of learners on full- time and substantial part-time courses, we found no examples where routine screening took place for the short courses. Understandably, centres felt that on such a short course, it would be inappropriate to spend time on screening, and indeed that it would be unpopular and potentially threatening to new learners.

39 However, in most colleges where the short courses were delivered in learning centres, there was a range of more informal arrangements in place to assess whether learners might need additional support. ***The role of the person who was the first point of contact for the learner (often the centre receptionist or administrator) was seen as crucial***, and in some colleges, such staff had undertaken basic skills awareness training. Typically, this person deals with the enrolment process, observing the learner reading and completing their enrolment form, so he or she will get an initial impression of their skills in those areas, and may provide help if required. He or she may also ask the learners about what they expect from the course, what other learning they have done, whether they have any qualifications, what they might want to do after the course and so on: so they will build up a picture of the learner's background and aspirations. In some centres, this initial 'interview' information was briefly recorded on a simple form, even though it was gleaned through an informal chat at the reception desk. Typically, tutors would then be apprised of learners' needs, and of course, in some cases, the person who deals with the enrolment may also be the tutor.

40 It is clearly ***more difficult to make such one-to-one assessments when the course is delivered at a community venue***, where all the learners may arrive together for a one-off course, having already enrolled by telephone. Tutors in such situations may well have the opportunity to observe learners reading, writing or using numbers, depending on the course content, but there will not be the same opportunity for this kind of individual assessment.

41 However learners' needs were assessed, we asked staff to estimate the numbers of short-course learners who had basic skills needs. Although there was a range of responses, again we found an ***average figure of around 10%.*** Colleges certainly regard this as a significant proportion, and the range of measures some colleges are putting in place to support these learners is evidence of the importance they place on it. There were over 170,000 enrolments on the short ICT courses in 2000/01, so it seems likely that 15,000–20,000 of these enrolments involved people with basic skills needs.

Survey of learners

42 We have assessed the written responses (reproduced in **Annex 3**) given by learners in the postcard survey, using the national standards in the new adult literacy core curriculum developed by the Basic Skills Agency in 2001. We estimate that 6.5% demonstrate spelling and handwriting skills below Level 1.

Implications for institutions

43 We discuss in many parts of this report some of the measures being taken in response to the needs of learners with basic skills needs. They fall into several broad categories.

- Making informal ***assessments of learners' skill levels***. This might involve training in basic skills awareness for a wide range of staff.
- Ensuring that learning materials and teaching methods ***are designed to take account of learners' basic skills needs***. This might involve more detailed training for tutors who are not basic skills specialists.
- Development work to ***map ICT curricula against the literacy and numeracy core curriculum standards*** (two examples of such work from Basic Skills Pathfinder areas are included in **Annexes 4 and 5**).
- Providing ***appropriate learner support*** during the course itself.
- Providing clear, user-friendly ***information about progression opportunities***.

44 Some colleges regarded the first term of the short-course initiative as a pilot project and had produced detailed and professional evaluations of the implementation and impact of the initiative, in the same way as might be done for an externally funded project. These evaluations involved staff and managers giving careful and systematic consideration to a wide range of issues arising from the initiative, and led to actions in areas such as staff development, course design, timing of courses, venues used and so on. These colleges had all identified the issue of learners with basic skills needs as a crucial one, and appear to have made most progress in terms of developing strategies to support learners with basic skills needs. In other words, ***formal systems of course review were more likely to identify issues and lead to improvements in provision.***

Key points

- There is less stigma involved in 'owning up' to a skills deficit in ICT than one in literacy or numeracy, and therefore the short ICT course environment is an appropriate one in which to start to address basic skills needs.
- About 10% of learners on short ICT courses appear to have basic skills needs.
- Given that it is not practical to undertake formal assessments on a short course, it is crucial that staff, including front-line staff, are trained to be 'basic skills aware'.
- Where short courses are delivered in learning centres, appropriate learner support can be provided for learners with basic skills needs.
- Where short courses are delivered by a single member of staff at a community venue, it is far more difficult to provide appropriate support
- Short-course learning materials can be designed to take account of learners with basic skills needs.
- Formal course reviews are likely to identify basic skills issues and lead to improvements in courses.

6 Progression

45 Information about progression was collected from two sources – the college questionnaire and the survey of learners.

46 The questionnaire asked colleges to provide information on how many learners on short ICT courses had progressed to another course, whether the course was in the same curriculum area, and whether it was at the same level. Not all colleges could provide this information – but for those that did, the ***overall progression rate was 50%.***

47 In terms of the type of progression, the results from the questionnaire were as shown in **Table K**:

Table K

Type of progression	% of progressing learners following this route
Another IT course at the same level	30%
Another IT course at a higher level	62%
A course in a different curriculum area at the same level	3%
A course in a different curriculum area at a higher level	5%
A course at another institution	Nil

48 The results from the survey of learners produce very similar results. The overall progression rate among learners who returned their survey postcards was 45%. Without exception, all the learners who said they had done another course since their 3- or 6-hour ICT course had progressed to another ICT course; and where titles were given, it is clear that many are at a level higher than the initial taster course. There was no single instance of a learner who had subsequently enrolled on a course in another curriculum area.

49 The progression rates across the five colleges involved in the survey of learners ranged from 31% to 54%. There was no significant difference in progression rates between the two types of venue. There was, however, a lower progression rate (35%) from the more specific courses than from the other two categories (49%). It seems likely that people attending the more specific courses achieved what they wanted to do – for example, they did indeed learn to use a scanner in 3 hours – without the need to do another course.

50 For the majority of the short courses that were genuine tasters or introductory sessions, encouraging and enabling progression was important to colleges. We saw various examples of how this could be done:

- a ***self-evaluation form*** for each learner which asked 'are there any other courses you would be interested in?', with a list of suggestions from various curriculum areas

- ***information leaflets*** about other ICT courses were included in learners' packs
- ***tutors gave advice*** or information about other courses during the taster session, either to a whole group or to individuals
- the offer of a formal ***guidance interview***. In one college out-centre this could be arranged using a video link to the main site.

51 There is further information about progression (including the links between learner satisfaction and progression) in the next section, dealing with learners' views and experiences.

Key points

- 45–50% of learners on short ICT courses appear to progress to another ICT course, with no progression to courses in other curriculum areas.
- Learners are more likely to progress from introductory or general courses than from courses covering a specific topic.
- About two-thirds of those progressing move to a course at a higher level.

7 Learners' views and experiences

52 In this section, we set out the results for the postal survey of learners (attached as **Annex 7**). This was designed as a simple postcard, similar to that used in the 'Bitesize' initiative. It was sent in February 2002 to just over 1000 learners who had enrolled on 3- and 6-hour ICT courses at five colleges. All these colleges were visited as part of the fieldwork, and thanks are extended to them for their help in distributing the postcards. A response rate of 13.8% was achieved.

53 The postcard asked learners the title of their course and the name of the venue. They were asked to rate the course on a four-point scale (excellent, good, average, poor) and whether or not they had done another course since (and if so, what). There was room for general comments, and 81% of those returning postcards added a comment.

54 The range of course titles reflects the fact that there are different kinds of short courses, as discussed further in **section 8**. Some were general IT tasters, some were seen as an introduction to one particular aspect of IT (such as word processing), and others were more self-contained or specific, such as 'how to use a scanner'.

55 Twenty-two per cent of the learners who replied had attended courses at venues that could be described as 'community venues' – either in out-centres with IT facilities or at community centres hired by the college. The remainder were held at 'mainstream' venues at learning centres in main college sites.

56 **Table L** shows the overall satisfaction levels.

Table L

Rating	%
Excellent	30
Good	45
Average	16
Poor	9

57 Perhaps not surprisingly, the progression rate among those learners who rated their 3- or 6-hour course as 'poor' was only 17%. ***A bad experience appears to have dissuaded people from continuing their learning***. However, there seems to be no equivalent motivating factor at the other end of the spectrum – the progression rates for all other learners were very similar. The overall pattern was as shown in **Table M**.

Table M

Rating	% progression rate
Excellent	48
Good	46
Average	50
Poor	17

58 There was a correlation between the kinds of written comment learners made about their course (see **paragraph 60** for a full analysis) and progression. Forty-seven of those giving generally positive comments went on to take another course, whereas the figure

for those giving generally negative comments was only 34%.

59 The comments that learners added to their postcards were very illuminating indeed. They demonstrate in simple and straightforward terms the huge benefits that many learners felt they had gained from their courses. They also describe the frustrations felt by many when the course did not live up to their expectations. The comments received are reproduced (as written) in **Annex 3**, and also provide an insight into the literacy levels of those responding to the survey.

60 In simple terms, we have classified 56% of the comments made as generally positive and 44% as generally negative. The positive comments were often more general in nature than the negative ones. We have categorised the comments into broad categories – in the tables below, these categories are ranked in order of frequency (with the most frequent at the top) – and we give some examples in **Tables N** and **O**.

Table N: Positive comments

Category	Examples
General	'Interesting and informative' 'Very good starter course for computer training' 'Good start & introduction to Powerpoint, so I could go away & 'play'' 'it was good and help people like me get to know more about the computer' 'made me wont to try out diffrent course's' 'Really good fun' 'it gave me the confidence to take further courses' 'when I statet it I did not think I would pass it but I did'
Tutors	'The tutor was exceptional – explanations very clear' 'was hard at first but the staff was great very helpful' 'The course was well documented and the tutors were very helpful' 'The course is very good. The teacher very patient. Wish I was younger.'
Learning resources	'The information book was good and easy to follow' 'Good materials, step by step booklet to follow'

Table O: Negative comments

Category	Examples
Not enough individual attention	'more personnal help would have been nice' 'Expected a 'small' group learning situation, but was given a manual to work through and had to 'ask' for help when needed. Could have gained as much from learning at home' 'Not enough one-to-one tuition' 'Not enough tutors to give a more one to one if you have problems' 'Not enough tutors'
Equipment	'Flat batteries in camera – no spares' 'There were only 3 scanners for 15 people, and at least one did not work' 'The equipment was in need of repair – tutor very good' 'Unfortunately on day I attended some equipment wasn't working. No time to complete the course.'
Tutors	'Staff not prepared' 'it started off very well, but I have become disillusend with the tutor as she spends more time discussing her own forthcoming holiday than concentrating on students' 'I think that some of the tutors could be a bit more understanding to we senior citizens'
General	'Not long enough and we didn't get onto the net' 'We went on the internet but the coarse was of no use I learned more from my next door friend' 'Poor equipment and venue. Not very well organised. Uninspiring' 'The class were given an extremely brief explanation, then left to play. Needed to be more structured'

61 It is difficult (and perhaps dangerous) to generalise too much, since the comments speak for themselves eloquently enough, but it is apparent that ***learners place a high value on the level of personal support they receive***. They praised tutors more than any other single aspect of the courses, and they mentioned lack of support more than any other single negative issue. It is also clear that ***reliable equipment is vital***, especially on a short course where there may be no time to make other arrangements or 'recover' from equipment failure.

62 In terms of the benefits perceived by learners, the positive comments fall into three broad categories:

- I gained the ***confidence*** to learn something else
- I learned something ***specific***
- the course was a generally ***positive experience*** (informative, interesting, fun).

63 It is interesting that the first two categories here reflect two of the three types of taster we identified in our Stage 1 report, when we categorised short courses as either:

- true 'tasters', designed to provide confidence in using a computer

- short courses with more specific aims
- 'introductory' courses designed to prepare learners for longer courses.

64 Some of the negative comments point to the importance of making it as clear as possible what people can expect in terms of course content or the learning environment. For example:

> 'The course was mainly about a particular piece of software and this wasn't made clear beforehand'
>
> 'Could not get to grips with it because instructor used Coreldraw system and my computer had Adobe'
>
> 'Because of eyesight problems i think i would have been bettr in a class with a tutor. Working DIY from an instruction manual was difficult.'

65 One further comment that occurred fairly frequently was that it would have been better if the course had been somewhat longer. These have not been categorised as either positive or negative for the above analysis. In some cases, the comment means that the learner's appetite had been whetted, and they would do more; whereas in other cases, it may mean that there was too much course content to absorb in the time allocated. As one tutor commented: 'We always try to leave them wanting more, but of course the learner must also feel that they have achieved their goals for the session.' Certainly there were no comments to the effect that the course was too long!

66 ***The extent to which colleges tried to get learners' views about their short course appears to vary considerably***. In the questionnaire, one-third of colleges said that they had done some kind of course evaluation with learners, and just over a half said that the short courses were subject to the same quality assurance systems as other courses. In our fieldwork, we saw examples where all learners were followed up by telephone and a brief note taken of their response; and another that involved systematic surveys of samples of ex-students, including those who had done short courses. Other colleges felt that to ask learners on a very short course to spend time filling in another form was unreasonable. They also felt that in an environment such as a learning centre, the learners would make their feelings clear to their tutors or other staff.

Key points

- Learners' satisfaction levels were generally high and did not depend on the type of course or venue.
- The progression rate among learners who rated their course as 'poor' was much lower.
- The level of personal support received is the most important issue for learners.
- Reliable equipment is crucial on short courses.
- Course aims need to be clearly set out to avoid misleading or disappointing some learners.
- The extent to which colleges seek learner feedback on short ICT courses varies considerably.

8 The courses

Introduction

67 At the time of our Stage 1 work, the opportunity for state subsidy for courses as short as 3 or 6 hours was new. As a consequence, much of the provision we looked at then was of a 'pilot' nature, and sometimes was considered as a project rather than part of an institution's core offering. In this second stage, some 12 months later, it is clear that in most institutions, ***these short ICT courses are now seen as one part of the overall portfolio*** of ICT courses. They are far less likely to be regarded by the providers as special or different in any significant way.

68 This 'mainstreaming' has produced positive and negative effects in terms of benefits for learners and potential learners. Institutions that have understood the potential of tasters to attract new learners, and to provide a 'safe' learning experience before learners make a choice about progression, have put in place the support that some learners need. In these institutions, a learner on an ICT course who has basic skills needs is much more likely to receive support than they would have been a year or two ago. On the other hand, if learners enrol for a 3-hour taster course and find that they are in the same large learning centre as many other established learners and have to compete with them for the attention of the hard-pressed staff, they might find their taster a rather negative experience. The feedback from learners shows that the most common negative comments were about not receiving enough individual support.

69 This section of the report explores these issues in more depth, by describing the variety of settings in which the short ICT courses are being offered, and the range of teaching and learning styles being used. The information in this section comes largely from the college questionnaire and from our fieldwork visits.

Venue

70 Colleges are using a range of venues to deliver short ICT courses. There are three main types:

- ***main sites where there are extensive IT facilities***, where tasters are offered either on a drop-in basis or as taught groups

- ***ICT learning centres in other locations***. These are sometimes 'high-street' style shopfront venues, although in other cases, colleges are establishing centres in residential areas in order to target those particular communities. Often this involves working in partnership with other users of such centres, but we also found examples of brand new centres being built. Typically such centres offer drop-in facilities, but normally offer tasters at specific times in the week

- Rooms in ***community venues***, with laptop computers being brought in for specific sessions. In other cases, school IT suites may be used. Clearly this type of venue tends to offer tasters as taught courses at pre-arranged times.

71 Colleges reported that, perhaps not surprisingly, ***people will not travel far for a short course***. Colleges that had attracted a lot of learners had done so by offering courses in a lot of different venues. One college, which was establishing centres in relatively deprived housing estates, said that its experience was that the best definition of

'accessible' for this provision was 'within walking distance'.

72 Some of the centres were also Learndirect centres. Staff at these centres were generally of the opinion that this was a benefit to learners, since it offered a wider choice of progression routes, although several expressed concern that the gap between basic IT provision and Learndirect courses was a large one, both in terms of content and study skills. There was limited evidence from the survey of learners that those who had experienced both supported learning from college tutors and the Learndirect approach preferred the former, although only a small number of respondents mentioned Learndirect at all. There was at least one example of a college that had a Learndirect centre, but had taken the decision not to offer any ICT tasters in it, because it felt that the approach should be very different.

73 Quite often, learning centres were not badged as college premises, in an attempt to create a different learning environment for people who might regard a college as threatening or beyond their experience. It is difficult to gauge learners' response to this. Almost all learners are very soon aware that the centre is operated by a college (they have to fill in an enrolment form, for example), but it appears to be the case that a wider range of people are likely to make initial enquiries at a centre that looks less like a traditional college or school. Some of ***the most active centres visited appeared to be regarded first and foremost as a community resource*** rather than an institution.

74 ***Learning centres are looking less and less like classrooms***. Increasing emphasis is being put on creating a professional business-like environment with high-quality decor to match the high-quality equipment. They often include, or are adjacent to, social areas which include refreshment facilities. One newly built IT centre visited included a crèche on site.

75 In our Stage 1 report, we noted some more informal venues, such as pubs and supermarkets. There was less evidence of this sort of approach during this second stage of the work, although it was taking place in some areas. The colleges that were offering courses in this way were enthusiastic about the potential of these more innovative venues to engage learners who would not attend a traditional centre.

Mode of delivery

76 In Stage 1, we reported: 'The vast majority of providers offered these short ICT courses as taught courses, with students in specific groups led by a tutor. It was felt that the target group of learners was likely to be lacking in confidence and would benefit from the support provided by a tutor and by being part of a group. In a few cases, learners attended flexible learning centres alongside learners engaged in a range of other ICT provision, but even in these cases, specific support was usually provided by a tutor or facilitator.'

77 There was less evidence of this in the second phase of our study. This pattern of taught courses was still evident in many cases, especially in community venues, as discussed above, but about ***one-third of the colleges are now also offering tasters on a drop-in basis in their main learning centres***, so that learners spend 3 hours in the centre alongside learners undertaking other programmes. Typically, these learners would be given an introductory workbook to follow. This arrangement, whatever the quality of the written material (which is often good), would appear to make ***it more difficult for staff to recognise the new learners***, and there is a danger that they might feel that they

were being left to their own devices. At one college with a very large learning centre with over 100 workstations, this problem had been identified and learners on the introductory programme all used computers in a particular section of the centre where the staffing ratio was higher.

78 The mode of delivery and, to some extent, the size of the venue is important when considering how to support learners with basic skills needs. If the learners are taught in a group, then the tutor needs to have some skill or experience in identifying such needs and supporting the learners. In a learning centre, it may be possible to have dedicated staff with such expertise. This is discussed in more detail in **paragraphs 94–99** on staffing.

Range of courses

79 In Stage 1, we identified three types of short course:

- true '***tasters***', designed to provide confidence in using a computer and to demonstrate the range of tasks that PCs can undertake.
- '***introductory***' courses designed to prepare learners for existing courses such as Computing for Beginners, CLAIT or similar provision
- short courses with more ***specific aims***, such as 'Introduction to the Internet' or 'Starting to use e-mail'.

80 These broad categories still apply, although we would now give some even more specific examples in the third category; for example, 'using a digital camera', 'learning to use your scanner' or 'Powerpoint for beginners'. In terms of the overall pattern of provision, we estimate that about ***40% of all courses are in the first category, 40% in the second and 20% in the third***. Colleges are much more likely to charge a fee for courses in the third category – the others are generally offered free.

81 Some colleges had analysed their initial experience of delivering short courses (especially those that had regarded the initiative as a cross-college project or pilot when they were first introduced), and had come to similar conclusions in terms of categorising them. This had enabled them to give specific consideration to issues like:

- how might we market each type of course?
- what support might the learners need, including those with basic skills needs?
- what initial assessment would be appropriate?
- what kind of learning materials would be suitable?
- what progression routes might be suitable?

82 In these colleges, it was clear that ***the time spent on these questions was of great benefit to learners.*** Such colleges were able to offer a comprehensive range of short courses, well targeted to suit their community, and then to deliver the courses in a range of settings, with staffing support, materials and learning environments to suit the learners.

Course content

83 Clearly, course content reflects the aims of the course, and as we have seen above, there are a number of possible general aims. Some courses were based on packages such as the BBC's *Webwise* or *Computers don't bite*. Many more were designed by the colleges themselves. ***Learners like to feel they have achieved something specific***, and some courses enabled learners to go away with an end product, such as a greetings card or their own personal certificate of achievement (both produced via a DTP package on an introductory course). Others had aims such as being able to access a particular website and perform specific tasks on it. Learners also appear to like ***very specific directions and instructions*** in a short course – there were several negative comments about 'being left to play', but no one complained about not being free to do what they wanted. A structured approach clearly helps to build confidence and enables people to recognise that they are making progress.

84 All these considerations point to the need for ***clear learning outcomes***. Nearly four-fifths of the colleges responding to the questionnaire said that their short courses had identified learning outcomes, and this was borne out in our fieldwork. We saw excellent examples of detailed lesson plans for 3-hour tasters.

85 One college made considerable efforts, as part of a summer programme with the overall theme of widening participation, to link ICT tasters with other curriculum areas normally associated with leisure activities, such as keep-fit and dressmaking. Learners spent a day in college, half of which was spent on a chosen 'leisure' class, and the other half on an ICT taster in which the learning materials were linked to the leisure activity. For example, the task might involve producing a personal fitness programme or an embroidery pattern. Learners were enthusiastic about the programme and could clearly see the relevance of the computer session.

86 Whatever the subject matter, learners like to have an ***individual learning pack*** that is specific to the course they have enrolled for – they do not like the idea that they are just doing part of a larger course.

Learning materials

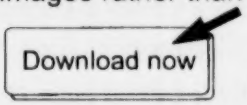
87 On our visits to colleges, we evaluated the learning materials used in the short courses. Many examples of excellent material were seen. Some colleges had produced very professional work packs, which were well presented as well as having excellent content. Some were produced in a ***lively modern style*** with excellent use of colour. Good practice had been followed in terms of using plenty of white space, appropriate font size and so on. Instructions were easy to follow and the language used was simple, especially when explaining technical terms (for example, one pack described the monitor as 'the bit like a television').

88 In most learning centres, ***materials were kept centrally***, with all tutors using the same materials. This is efficient – it ensured good standards of photocopying etc and the standardisation of course content.

89 Good examples of materials included the ***course outline, with learning outcomes***. They enabled learners to access the equipment easily, and included information about the location of other equipment (such as printers) that might be elsewhere in the room.

90 Some materials had been written to take account of the needs of ***learners with low literacy levels***. Such material for a general computer taster would typically include:

- clear diagrams of the equipment involved
- images showing exactly what the learner would see on their monitor rather than a written description of it
- images rather than words to describe what the learner should do (for example



rather than 'click on the icon marked download now').

91 Other examples of materials of less good quality were seen. Some had clearly been photocopied many times, resulting in a smudged difficult-to-read effect, with page titles cut off. Some had a small font size and dense text that was difficult to follow.

92 Some exercises involved accessing existing Word files on the computer and then adding to them and manipulating them in various ways (perhaps to practise saving and retrieving files as well as learning something about Word). In such exercises, it was useful if much of the ***text had already been keyed in*** so that learners who were not familiar with a keyboard were not inhibited or slowed down by their lack of typing skills.

Techniques to help learning

93 In addition to the quality of the learning materials, it is possible to identify a number of other things that learners appear to appreciate and which aid learning. Learners like:

- to feel that they are understanding instructions, whether verbal or written, and that they are able ***to do what is being asked of them immediately***. Some learners expressed frustration if left to 'play' or 'flounder'.
- 'back-up' ***printed instructions*** for reference to annotate and take home so that they can practise
- to ***feel part of a group*** of people who are at a similar stage of learning – so they don't feel stupid
- something 'immediate' to show for their efforts – some ***final product*** such as a printout which is evidence of their learning
- ***one-to-one support*** from the tutor to overcome difficulties quickly.

94 Some material allowed learners to ***assess*** their own progress, using a system that enabled them to tick off what they could do against a list of tasks (I can type some text, delete text, highlight text, change font type etc). Such an approach helps learners to recognise their achievement.

Staffing

95 We have seen that learners really value the support they receive from college staff. They

benefit from clear explanations and advice, and value individual support at their workstation. The general manner of the tutors and other staff sets the tone of the whole learning experience, which learners might describe as 'helpful', 'friendly', 'supportive', 'interesting', 'fun' and so on. We have also seen that the most frequent negative comment made by learners was about not getting enough individual attention. Clearly the staff are the most important factor in determining learners' perceptions about their course.

96 On our visits to colleges we interviewed managers, tutors, reception staff, administrators and learner support staff involved with short ICT courses. Much of the information in this report is based on the information we received from them. A common feature was the high degree of ***flexibility in staff contracts***, to reflect the opening hours of learning centres (often 9am–9pm on weekdays and a shorter time on Saturday and occasionally Sunday). One college with several learning centres rotated the staff team among them so that all staff had experience of all types of learner (and *vice versa*). Very few, if any, of the tutors were engaged on traditional lecturer contracts, and in some centres, staff had several roles. For example, they might undertake administrative and reception duties as well as supporting learners at their workstations. Such staff felt strongly that this enabled the learner to be well supported during their whole experience, and made it easier for them to ask for help or advice about the course itself or about progression opportunities.

97 One college held weekly 'surgeries' to encourage people to drop in to their centre. These surgeries were staffed by volunteers, who encouraged people to try a taster course on their next visit to the centre.

98 ***None of the short-course tutors we met were traditional IT specialists***. Many had backgrounds in business administration or adult and community education. Managers said that for taster-type courses, the main requirement was for tutors to have a high degree of ***empathy with learners***, and many had been selected using such criteria. Interestingly, we met several tutors who had themselves been learners at the learning centre where they now worked. They all felt – and their managers agreed – that this gave them a particular empathy and credibility with current learners.

99 A key element of staffing identified by all colleges visited was the need to ***have staff qualified in basic skills support*** available to help learners. In some cases, where the size of the learning centre justified it, there were learning support specialists based in the centre itself. In other cases, they could be brought in because a basic skills centre was very close to the ICT centre. Others had made arrangements for specialists to be at the centre at specific times; for example, when tasters were run. The most difficult situation to manage was the one-off course in a community venue, where the only member of staff present would be the tutor; in these cases, efforts were made to ensure that this tutor was trained or qualified in basic skills.

100 The staff who were in learning support roles were often not 'traditional' adult basic skills specialists with backgrounds in adult basic education or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). They were often administrative staff or other tutors/trainers who had undertaken staff development in basic skills. Several managers interviewed spoke of an ***urgent need to develop more staff*** in this area, and this was identified as a key issue by those colleges that had evaluated their short ICT courses.

9 Conclusions

101 In this section, we summarise key findings and identify some implications for stakeholders. We also seek to identify questions for further research. In each of the sections below are four paragraphs. The first deals with 'what we know', the second with 'what we don't know', the third with implications for stakeholders, and the fourth poses questions for further research.

Overall impact of short ICT courses

102 Short ICT courses are clearly popular and have resulted in significant numbers of people learning new skills. For many, it will have been their first taste of learning for a long time. Many people are attracted to these courses simply because they are short – they are convenient and also non-threatening to learners who may be unable or unwilling to commit to a longer period of learning. On the whole, learners enjoy them and many progress to other courses. For many people, there is less stigma attached to the idea of learning how to use a computer as compared to learning literacy, so these courses attract people who would not enrol in other curriculum areas.

103 As the Information Age gathers momentum, and information and communications technology becomes ever more sophisticated, it is not clear whether this appetite for learning about computers will be maintained. It is possible that a stage will be reached where there is just as much stigma attached to poor ICT skills as there is currently with literacy and numeracy. It may become more difficult to attract learners to courses such as 'Computing for the Terrified' or 'IT for the Nervous Novice'.

104 Short ICT courses should continue to be funded and providers should continue to offer them in as imaginative a way as they did when these initiatives were first introduced. Major developments in technology (such as the internet) will provide opportunities to offer new courses, so course content needs to be kept under close review.

105 It would be interesting to learn more about learners' motives and expectations when they enrol for short courses. Not surprisingly, since time is precious on such courses, providers have not collected much information about such issues.

Learners

106 These courses have been particularly successful in recruiting older learners, and also appear to appeal to young people from minority ethnic groups. Many of the learners attracted to these courses are 'new learners' – this may be their first taste of learning since leaving school.

107 We do not yet fully know how successful the courses have been in targeting all 'widening participation' learners, although the signs are encouraging. There are also large gaps in our knowledge about learners' 'learning history', because of the lack of any national system of tracking learners.

108 Providers need to make sure they have facilities and support mechanisms that are appropriate for groups of learners with this profile. Far more useful information could be obtained about learners' previous learning history and previous qualification levels if

questions relating to these issues were included on the Individualised Student Record.

Many providers could also monitor learners' progression in more detail than they do currently.

109 In addition to further research on the widening participation issue, the question of young learners from minority ethnic backgrounds deserves further attention. Are they less IT-literate than their white counterparts? Are they doing short ICT courses rather than longer ones?

Basic skills

110 Some of the people who enrol on short ICT courses will have basic skills needs – indeed, some will have enrolled with the expectation that learning about a computer will help them to address these needs.

111 Our estimate that 10% of learners will have basic skills needs is only an estimate, and indeed we have not rigorously defined what we mean by basic skills. The estimate is based on a fairly small sample of colleges and on a sample of learners. There is clearly much that we do not yet know in this area.

112 This finding is very significant for providers. There are implications for curriculum design, course materials, tutoring arrangements and learner support. Some providers are mapping ICT courses against the national literacy and numeracy standards. Institutions need to provide learners with opportunities for screening, and need to consider how to provide support for learners with basic skills needs – especially those who progress to other courses. Many of these issues will have significant staff development implications.

113 It would be useful to know more about the actual skill levels of learners on short courses, especially new learners.

Progression

114 About half of the learners on short ICT courses progressed to other ICT courses, many of which were at a higher level. Learners were far less likely to progress if they rated their short course as 'poor'.

115 We do not know whether any particular groups of learners were more likely to progress than others, although some institutions have systems that would enable them to investigate such issues.

116 Clearly, very many short courses are 'tasters', designed to encourage learners to enrol on another course, and we have made no judgement about whether a figure of around 50% represents a good progression rate or not. Providers need to ensure that clear information about progression opportunities is available. Indeed, such information might be seen as integral to some types of taster course. Members of staff have a very important role to play in providing information and advice about progression opportunities.

117 It seems somewhat surprising that not a single learner in our survey mentioned progressing to a course in another curriculum area. It is possible that they thought the

question related only to IT courses and therefore they did not mention other courses. If short courses are indeed designed to give learners a taste of learning itself, we would expect colleges to make learners aware of a wide range of other available courses. It would be useful to explore this issue further, perhaps by looking at learner movements in a particular college.

The learning experience

118 Most learners enjoyed their short courses and described a range of benefits, ranging from increased confidence and better skill levels to simply having fun. By far the most important factor for learners was the quantity and quality of the individual support they received from members of staff. They praised this where it was good, and complained about it if it was poor or insufficient. They were also frustrated if equipment did not work, or if the course was not what they expected.

119 We do not know what expectations learners had of their courses – although some colleges may have collected some information about this.

120 Staff support for learners is the key to successful courses, and short courses must be generously staffed to provide the level of individual support that learners need. Providers should regard short-course provision as somewhat special, given its ability to attract so many new learners. The evidence from this study is that these courses operate much better as small 'taught' groups, even if they take place in learning centres. Equipment needs to be of a high standard and well maintained. The staff are crucial, of course, and need to be sensitive to learners' needs. Development activities for these staff should focus on how to identify and support adults who may be new to learning, some of whom will have basic skills needs. Course materials need to be clear, graphic and easy to understand. Providers should be clear about the purpose of the courses – are they tasters, introductory, or do they lead to specific skills? Generous staffing levels are, of course, only possible if these courses are generously funded in the first place, and funding bodies need to keep this under review. Given that all genuinely introductory courses seem to be offered free to the learners, there may be a case for differentiating between this group (about 80% of the total) and the remainder (eg 'How to use a scanner'), for which most colleges levy a fee.

121 It would be interesting to undertake a comparative study of learning materials used on short ICT courses, and investigate the impact on learners' perceptions, and on subsequent progression and achievement rates.

Annex 1 Summary of findings from Stage 1 report

1 **This initiative was widely welcomed by institutions**. It was seen as providing a much-needed opportunity to offer new courses which would have a wide appeal and which would help in achieving objectives relating to widening participation. In over three-quarters of the institutions visited, the initiative had triggered development work involving course design, times and venues. It stimulated outreach work and led to institutions reviewing marketing approaches, learning resources and staff development activity. It was also welcomed because it recognised the value of informal learning that does not lead directly to a qualification.

2 **The initiative has had a substantial impact on the pattern of provision in ICT**. At the time of the fieldwork, ICT tasters had already been delivered in 90% of the institutions in the sample. A large number of new courses have been offered, and have attracted large numbers of learners. There is good institutional evidence that many of them are from the 'technologically disadvantaged' target group, and that a significant number are people who have not engaged in learning for some time, although there are no systems in place to track individuals who may have moved between providers. At those institutions supplying data during the fieldwork, progression rates from the short courses have generally been high, with all but two reporting that more than 60% of learners had moved on to other courses. Learners were enthusiastic when describing their further studies.

3 **Institutions report that a significant number of the learners enrolling on ICT courses appear to have basic skills needs**. This is an important finding, and one that deserves further study. There are implications for policy-makers, funding bodies, institutions and tutors. It would be a mistake to assume that all adult learners with basic skills needs are participating in basic skills programmes.

4 **The impact on basic skills provision has not been significant**. Institutions appear to have had more flexibility in the way they offered basic skills courses in the past and therefore this initiative was not seen as providing the same kind of new opportunities as ICT. Less than a quarter of institutions visited had developed new provision in basic skills for this initiative. A shortage of basic skills coordinators and managers also appears to have hindered development work.

5 **The initiative did encourage some new provision in programme areas other than ICT and basic skills**, especially in institutions that had little or no previous experience of offering non-schedule 2 courses. However, less than a quarter of institutions visited were offering courses in this category, while other institutions planned provision in this area, but withdrew their plans when the further guidance appeared. Analysis of the ISR data for 3-, 4- and 5-hour courses has highlighted some statistical anomalies that give rise to further exploration.

6 **The initiative has highlighted the crucial value of 'taster' provision for many learners.** It is clear that these very short courses enabled people to sample the experience of learning as well as the subject area. It enabled them to see what the learning environment was like, how it felt to be part of a group of learners, and to get to know a tutor. It appears that the taster experience can be a valuable part of the 'entry' process, alongside advice and guidance, in helping people to decide their next steps and in providing self-confidence. Some learners are reluctant to commit themselves to a longer course for many reasons – uncertainty about the time commitment, their ability, the course content, costs and so on – and a taster can help them to decide whether it

would suit their needs. Tasters also help in terms of progression and achievement, because they can help people to gauge their ability and interest, and to decide the most appropriate progression route. This crucial role played by tasters warrants further study – it has implications for funding bodies, for the ways in which institutions plan their curriculum, and for tutors.

7 **Tutor-led courses, where students are taught as a group, were a key feature of good practice described by learners, tutors and managers**. Learners valued working with a tutor who could explain things clearly and did not 'just leave them to it'. Some learners said that they had decided to enrol for a further course because they knew that the same tutor would be leading it.

Annex 2 Key issues identified in Stage 1 report

1 This was a successful initiative, which has highlighted the intrinsic value of short episodes of learning. **This should be recognised in future funding methodologies.**

2 This initiative has shown that ICT is of interest to many learners with basic skills needs. Learners have been attracted to the ICT taster because it has required a minimum commitment of time, it has been carefully described as 'for beginners', and there have been no expectations in terms of either previous experience or gaining a qualification. **It is important that policies and strategies are developed – by funding bodies and institutions – to link basic skills provision with ICT.**

3 The majority of providers in the sample used information systems that are able to identify if a learner is attending a course at that institution for the first time. However, no provider could identify whether an individual had attended formal or informal learning opportunities elsewhere (locally, nationally or internationally). **It is important that a national system is developed to track progression of learners across providers** (for example, by allocating individuals with a lifelong learning number similar to the National Insurance system). This would provide valuable information about learner behaviour and would enable policy steers to target genuinely new learners.

4 The taster opportunity is a whole experience and should not be interpreted as only tasting the subject. Individual learners need to feel comfortable in their surroundings, with their tutor, the teaching approaches and in the company of their fellow learners. They are also tasting how taking the time out of their lives to do this fits in with their work, leisure time, and home responsibilities etc. **Tasters should be recognised as a valuable first step for adult learning and funded accordingly.**

5 Taster programmes need to be planned and delivered to meet the wide range of needs which an adult learner brings to a learning situation. This should involve appropriate consultation, provision of information, adult-friendly environments, empathy, appropriate teaching methods, resources and support which take account of the variety of learning styles, abilities and interests. It should also make links with further learning opportunities. **These factors all have resource implications, and this should be recognised in any funding methodology.**

6 When learners experience success, recognise their achievement and feel comfortable in the learning environment, they often widen their horizons in terms of their personal aspirations. If they have learned successfully on one occasion, they are often tempted to try something different, which is not necessarily at the next level in the same curriculum area. (Learners in this study who had done an IT taster were thinking about studying a language to prepare for holidays, or aromatherapy to alleviate stress). **We should recognise and value 'progression' in a broad sense, so as to include vertical, horizontal and other forms of development.**

7 There was a wide range of institutional responses to the initiative. Those institutions that used it most effectively had taken a **whole-college approach**, with support and direction from a senior manager. They had also considered how best to implement the short-course initiative in conjunction with other related initiatives such as the non-schedule 2 pilots, unitisation and Learndirect.

Annex 3 Learners' comments

Eighty-one per cent of the learners who returned postcards wrote something against the prompt 'your comments about the course.....'. We have referred to, and quoted, these comments at many points in the report, but taken as a whole, they are so powerful that we have decided to reproduce them here in full, exactly as written.

THERE WERE ONLY 3 SCANNERS FOR 15 PEOPLE, AND AT LEAST ONE DID NOT WORK

It was good and help people like me get to know more about the computer

WHEN I STATET IT I DID NOT THINK I WOULD PASS IT BUT I DID

The course started with a demonstration/talk. I could neither see the computer screen nor hear what was said. I felt as if I was floundering during my personal practice time. Help was very slow. Course numbers should have been limited, so that the standard was higher because staff could give help more quickly.

Made me wont to try out different course's

The class were given an extremely brief explanation and then left to play. Needed to be more structured.

I HAD A STROCK so it wasn't Any USE TO ME, AS I WAS HAVING to go over THINGS each WEEK again. I didn't feel as thow I WAS Getting any further each week was the same

Good

TOO SHORT

NONE

TOO SHORT

VERY ENJOYABLE AND INFORMATIVE – EVERYTHING EXPLAINED CLEARLY

a good, friendly introduction to computing

Fine – once we got going

The course would have been difficult for anyone not already familiar with a computer. I was given the RSA Internet Technologies course and told to 'dip into it'

1 A little rushed (a lot of information in a short time)
2 Weekly intervals meant difficulty in recalling previous week's data
3 Insufficient 'one to one' instruction in practical sessions (always a problem on computer courses in my experience)
4 Lack of same Web Construction programme on home computer precluded opportunities for home practice between sessions

Very good and encouraged me to try the full course. Pity thr aren't more taster courses

Plenty of demonstration but not enough individual help

SEEMED TO RELY ON REP FROM NATIONAL COMPUTER RETAILER WHO WAS NOT VERY WELL ORGANISED.

Very good – I personally could have done with more time.

More personnal help would have been nice.

Useful.

UNFORTUNATELY ON DAY I ATTENDED SOME EQUIPMENT WASN'T WORKING NO TIME TO COMPLETE THE COURSE. HOWEVER, I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ANOTHER TRY AT SCANNER/CAMERA 'TASTER' IN FUTURE

The premises were too crowded. I tried to work with books in my lap as there was no space by the computer to put them down.

Very enjoyable.

I would have been usefull to be able to bring some notes away with us.

Expected a 'small' group learning situation, – but was given a manual to work through and had to ask for help when needed. Could have gained as much from learning at home. Would probably have sampled other 'Tasters' but at £15 a course, and 'self teaching' – feel this is rather expensive when there are 'free' courses available.

THE COURSE WAS WELL DOCUMENTED AND THE TUTORS WERE VERY HELPFUL.

Easy to Understand and learned a lot. Most helpful.

STAFF NOT PREPARED – FLAT BATTERIES IN CAMERA – NO SPARES.

NEED A FULL COURSE ON SCANNERS

REALLY GOOD FUN

LEFT TO OWN DEVIC ES. LONG, LONG WAIT FOR HELP IF AT ALL.

Would have preferred a smaller room, smaller class, with easier access to tutor.

Would not wish to study the whole internet course

THE COURSE WAS WELL DOCUMENTED AND THE TUTORS WERE VERY HELPFUL

The course was mainly about a particular piece of software and this wasn't made clear beforehand

Excellent content, allowed learning to take place, gave confidence to continue working with Powerpoint at home
THE COURSE IS VERY GOOD. THE TEACHER VERY PATIENT. WISH I WAS

YOUNGER.

I THINK THAT SOME OF THE TUTORS COULD BE A BIT MORE UNDERSTANDING TO WE SENIOR CITIZENS

ANY MORE?

POORLY WRITTEN MANUAL (FOR THE NOVICE). ONLY TWO TUTORS – LONG WAIT FOR QUERIES TO BE EXPLAINED. AS A RESULT I WASTED 3 HRS OF A VERY BUSY SCHEDULE. PS I AM CURRENTLY DOING WORD PROCESSING WHICH IS EXCELLENT.

WOULD HAVE LIKED MORE TIME ON DIGITAL CAMERA

NOT LONG ENOUGH

PLEASANT ENVIRONMENT, BOOK WAS EASY TO FOLLOW

I enjoyed the tasters. On the courses the workbooks were not always accurate and sometimes confusing

VERY WELL EXPLAINED I THOUGHT

VERY COMPREHENSIVE AND WELL TAUGHT

It gave me confidence to begin to use the family computer

NOT LONG ENOUGH AND WE DIDN' T GET ONTO THE NET

NOT LONG ENOUGH AND DIDN'T GET ON THE NET

A good taster covering E-Mail, Navigating and Searching the web. Preferred to study from Learndirect library books

I wasn't sure I was in the right place, and nobody showed me what to do exactly. I was given a certificate for all sorts, but really, just surfed the net for about 30 minutes.

Excellent introduction to computers, and Fun!!

VERY GOOD. WELL WORTH ATTENDING BUT PERHAPS A LITTLE TOO WIDE RANGING.

QUITE INTERESTING. I DON'T HAVE A COMPUTER SO I MISS THE PRACTICE

GAVE ME AN INDICATION OF THE USE OF THE INTERNET

Obtained useful advice (including basics of computing) prior to my buying one

TAUGHT US HOW TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE WEB – SENT AND RECEIVE E-MAILS. TOOK AWAY SOME OF THE MYSTERY!

MORE TIME REQUIRED FOR PRACTICE, PERSONALLY, AS I DO NOT YET HAVE A COMPUTER.

BRILLIANT TUTOR

The course was good, the teacher poor (playing games instead of helping us etc)

GAINED QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS NEEDED, WITH STAFF SUPPORT

IT GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE TO TAKE FURTHER COURSES

Very basic and all very slow

Thought it was good possibly better to have a few more people for one-to-one training though.

EASY TO FOLLOW. HELP IF REQUIRED.

Purely a PR exercise designed to coax enrolement on IT courses

An excellent introduction to all basic computer functions

SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO GET ON THE COURSE ONLINE OTHERWISE VERY GOOD HAS YOU COULD TAKE YOUR TIME.

THE INFORMATION BOOK WAS GOOD AND EASY TO FOLLOW

V competent introduction to basic computer functions

Quite a short course, but enough to gain very basic knowledge on P.Point

GOOD MATERIALS, STEP BY STEP BOOKLET TO FOLLOW

A VERY GOOD INSIGHT FOR BEGINNERS IN THE USE OF COMPUTORS

VERY HELPFUL BUT I NEED MORE INSTRUCTION

Tutor was helpful and I passed the required tests but not having a computer made me lack confidence to do any more courses or go further!

NOT MUCH HELP TO SAY I HAD NEVER BEEN ON A COMPUTER BEFORE.

VERY HELPFUL. INTRODUCED ME TO NEW DESIGNES AND COLOUR CHARTS. NEWS ON FORTHCOMING SHOWS AND EXHIBITIONS

THE TUTOR WAS EXCEPTIONAL – EXPLANATIONS VERY CLEAR.

Not enough one-to-one tuition

I ENJOYED IT VERY MUCH

Only one lesson. Too many students for initial class.

A VERY GOOD INTRODUCTION TO NEW COMPUTER USERS. A GOOD START

IT WAS A VERY EXPLANITRY COURSE

IT WAS VERY EXPLANITRY COURSE

A good short introduction to many aspects of computers – what could be achieved.

Good staff very helpful

Learndirect – very poor
[named] College's own courses had good content and structure. Their tutors were very good. However stopped going when they stopped individual progress classes and went on to single subject classes. Learn Direct course was badly constructed, the internet service was continually faulty and the advice was almost none existent. I can say nothing of merit about L Direct. A terrible experience.

NOT ENOUGH TUTORS TO GIVE A MORE ONE TO ONE IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS.

Tutor, Venue, Flexibility, etc excellent. IT programme very unreliable and frustrating.

ALL THE COURSES WERE VERY GOOD UNTIL THE FORMAT CHANGED FROM INDIVIDUAL TUITION TO ALL STUDENTS DOING THE SAME THING. AFTER THAT I WENT ON TO LEARNDIRECT ON THE INTERNET AND IT WAS A BADLY ORGANISED INCOMPETENT COURSE BY THE PEOPLE WHO PUT IT ON THE NET. ALL [named] COLLEGE'S TUTORS WERE EXCELLENT.

ALL TUTORS WERE VERY HELPFUL AND UNDERSTANDING

It was interesting and informative. The tutor was very patient.

A LITTLE LONGER NEXT TIME?

Was hard at first BUT THE StaFF WAS GREat VERY HELPFUL,

IT WAS ENJOYABLE AND INTERESTING

Enjoyed course. Found staff helpful

WE WENT ON THE INERNET but the COARSE WAS OFF NO USE I LEARNED MORE FROM MY NEXT DOOR FRIEND.

Not enough tutors

It gave a realistic picture of what could follow and the staff were helpful

I would have preffered to have had backup reading material for each section of the course.

COULD NOT GET TO GRIPS WITH IT BECAUSE INSTRUCTOR USED COREL DRAW SYSTEM AND MY COMPUTER HAD ADOBE

A reasonable starter course

It started off very well, but I have become disillusened with the tutor as she spends more time discussing her own forthcoming holiday than concentrating on students.

Very understanding allowed you to work at your pace with quality help

VERY GOOD STARTER COURSE FOR COMPUTER TRAINING

A better balance between information and hans on ie more practice in using the computer as in the field required

THE TUTORS AND STAFF WERE MOST HELPFUL AND EQUIPMENT EXCELLENT.

IT GAVE ME AN IDEA OF HOW COMPUTERS WORK

Interesting and helped me with my other courses

A good insight to move around the computer but not really enough individual attention for medium learners, although other students were very helpful to each other.

Poor equipment and venue. Not very well organised. Uninspiring. I would be interested in future courses of better quality.

Basic Info given to help with future employment requirement

Informative, well presented content and good info as to how to progress

ENJOYED THE COURSE – VERY INSTRUCTIVE BUT COMPUTERS MISBEHAVED BADLY – STILL IT TESTED ONES (EVERYONES) NERVES.

I THINK A SLIGHTLY LONGER TIME WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL TO ALLOW MORE 1;1 FOR NON COMPUTER LITERATE PEOPLE

THE EQUIPMENT WAS IN NEED OF REPAIR. TUTOR WAS VERY GOOD

GOOD START AND INTRODUCTION TO POWERPOINT, SO I WOULD GO AWAY AND 'PLAY'

WHETTED THE APPETITE

Very interesting and informative

WE HAD VERY GOOD TUTORS AND I FOUND IT VERY INTERESTING (I am 88 yrs old)

YES A GOOD IDEA. TUTORS SOMETIMES BUSY

VERY INFORMATIVE AND INTERESTING

BECAUSE OF EYESIGHT PROBLEMS I THINK I WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTR IN A CLASS WITH A TUTOR. WORKING DIY FROM AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL WAS DIFFICULT.

Annex 4 Mapping basic skills elements against an ICT programme

(part of the Gloucestershire Pathfinder Project)

A project to map the Basic Skills Level 1 core curricula (numeracy and literacy) against an Open College Network (OCN) accredited IT programme has been jointly funded by Gloucestershire's OCN and Adult Continuing Education and Training service.

This has involved:

- looking at each of the assessment criteria of the IT units
- identifying the learning and assessment activities which will be used to deliver the IT units
- identifying the literacy and numeracy skills which learners would use in those activities
- mapping the literacy and numeracy core curricula elements against those activities/evidence.

This has the potential to provide:

- an unstigmatised gateway (ie the IT course) for people with basic skills needs – this will help to achieve national targets
- an assessment of the learners' basic skills needs in most/some/a range of numeracy and literacy elements
- an initial/diagnostic assessment which could be used as a starting point for additional basic skills support
- recognition of achievement/accreditation for basic skills learning alongside IT
- evidence for basic skills accreditation
- a model for basic skills development across the curriculum
- A model for mapping basic skills national curricula against other awarding bodies' assessment criteria.

Potential issues:

- people with Level 1 literacy skills/needs may have higher/different levels of IT skills/needs – so the basic skills curricula should be mapped to higher levels of IT too
- how will the 'assessment' be made transparent so that the learner knows s/he is being assessed for basic skills when they thought they were coming for an IT course?
- will IT tutors be trained in basic skills?
- will basic skills tutors be trained to deliver IT?
- will basic skills and IT specialists work alongside one another using a team-teaching approach?

Annex 5 Integrating basic skills with the IT curriculum

(part of the Thanet Pathfinder Project)

The community education department of Thanet College works in partnership with community groups, church groups, libraries and schools to deliver a range of courses, including IT classes, out in the community.

It is estimated that a large proportion of community education students have basic skills levels equal to Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3. The aim is to develop basic skills up to Level 1 through the IT curriculum.

Typically, a learner enrols on an Absolute Beginners course (2 hours per week for five weeks) followed by a Beginners course (2 hours per week for 10 weeks). Open College Network accreditation is offered for the 30-hour programme.

Every student who attends a class for four weeks and above has a student action plan. This is a paper-based self-diagnosis of the learner's skills, including IT skills. It includes self-assessment in terms of 'number work', 'speaking' and 'reading'. If a student identifies support needs, the tutor offers to organise someone to work with him or her and gives the student a flyer which contains the integrated support team's phone number. It is then the responsibility of the student to make the phone call. Tutors also refer learners to the support team if a specific need is identified, such as dyslexia.

A shorter version of the student action plan is currently being developed for half-day taster courses.

The IT team have written elements of the national literacy and numeracy curricula into the IT scheme of work so that basic skills are developed alongside the IT skills.

Contact: Melissa Barnes, community education department, Thanet College
Tel 01843 280540
e-mail staff-mab@thanet.ac.uk

3 and 6 hour ICT courses

learning and skills development agency

Please use black ink to complete the questionnaire, to help with the electronic scanning.
The information recorded on this form will not be disclosed to third parties in a manner which would allow you to be identified personally, except where it is disclosed on a confidential basis to third parties engaged to assist the Learning and Skills Development Ageny in the analysis of that information. Nor will your college be identified in any report or dissemination of the findings of this survey.

Previous qualifications and Basic Skills needs

Q1 **In Stage One there was anecdotal evidence that many ICT students had Basic Skills needs and had felt comfortable to enrol on a computer course. Does this fit with your experience?**

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Q2 **Which of the following processes/systems are in place?**
Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Basic skill screening process used for all learners in the institution, and records kept
- ☐ Records kept of the number of learners who progressed to a Basic Skills learning programme
- ☐ Records kept of the number of learners referred to Basic Skills provision/learner support
- ☐ Other methods of identifying needs *(please provide details below)*

Q3 **Based upon your evidence how many 3/6 hour ICT course learners had Basic Skills needs?**

Q4 **Please indicate the number of learners who had achieved qualifications prior to the 3 or 6 hour learning programme at the following levels:**

- ☐ None
- ☐ Entry
- ☐ Level 1 (e.g.GCSE grade D-G, CSE, GNVQ Foundation)
- ☐ Level 2 (e.g. GCSE grade A-C, O level pass, GNVQ Intermediate)
- ☐ Level 3 (e.g. A level, GNVQ Advanced, National Diploma)
- ☐ Level 4 (e.g. HNC, HND, Degree)

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New learners

Q5 **One of the aims of the 3 and 6 hour courses was to attract "new learners". Several definitions of "new learner" have been used by providers. Which of the following is the nearest to the one your institution used?** *Please mark only one box.*

- ☐ Learners new to IT
- ☐ Learners new to the institution
- ☐ Learners new to post-16 learning
- ☐ Learners who had not previously enrolled on a course with any of the partner providers
- ☐ Learners who were not previously engaged in any learning activity since leaving compulsory education
- ☐ Learners who had no involvement in formal learning for three years or more

Q6 **Using your definition, how many new learners participated in 3 or 6 hour ICT courses?** ☐

Q7 **How many new learners were from 'Widening Participation' postcode areas?** ☐

Progression

Q8 **Please identify how many learners have, to date, progressed in the following ways:**

- ☐ Enrolled on another IT course at the same level
- ☐ Enrolled on another IT course at a higher level
- ☐ Enrolled on a different course in the same curriculum area at the same level
- ☐ Enrolled on a different course in the same curriculum area at a higher level
- ☐ Enrolled on a different course in a different curriculum area at the same level
- ☐ Enrolled on a different course in a different curriculum area at a higher level
- ☐ Enrolled on any course at a different institution

Q9 **How many of the above learners are receiving / have received learning support on the above courses?** ☐

Q10 **How many learners have enrolled on a Basic Skills course, e.g. community classes, work based courses, family learning courses, workshops?** ☐

Teaching and Learning

Q11 Have you done any course evaluations with the 3 and 6 hour ICT learners?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

If so, may we have a copy of the report?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

(Please attach and return with this questionnaire)

Q12 We'd like to talk to learners about their experience of IAG (Initial Advice and Guidance), their learning experiences, support, etc. Do you have a system of following up students that we could tap into?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Quality Assurance

Q13 Were the 3 and 6 hour ICT courses subject to the same QA systems as other courses - e.g. lesson observations, student evaluations, course review, etc?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Q14 Did the courses have identified learning outcomes?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Q15 We would like to look at examples of materials used, teaching methods, how specific needs of learners were met. May we contact you to discuss this?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Ufi

Q16 Do you have a local learndirect centre?

Yes ☐ ☐ No

Q17 What is the relationship between the 3 and 6 hour ICT initiative and learndirect?

Profile of learners

Q18 What is the age and gender of the learners?

	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 49	50 - 64	65+
Male	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q19 How many learners are there in each of the following ethnic groups?

Asian:
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Asian - other

Black:
- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Black - other

- ☐ White
- ☐ Mixed race
- ☐ Other ethnicity
- ☐ Not known

Contact details

We would like to talk to staff who were or are involved with the 3 and 6 hour ICT courses. If you are willing for us to make direct contact, please give their current contact details here:

Name ☐ **'Phone** ☐

e-mail ☐

☐ SMT
☐ Programme Manager
☐ Tutor

Name ☐ **'Phone** ☐

e-mail ☐

☐ SMT
☐ Programme Manager
☐ Tutor

Name ☐ **'Phone** ☐

e-mail ☐

☐ SMT
☐ Programme Manager
☐ Tutor

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it to: Graham Knight, LSDA, FREEPOST (BS6745), London SE11 5BR, by 19th October 2001.

THIS IS PART OF AN EVALUATION PROJECT FOR THE LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Please tell us what **YOU** thought about your **computer taster course**

Please fill in this card to tell us what you thought of the 3 or 6 hour computer taster course you did at your local college. We'd also like to know if you've done another course. This will help us to improve taster courses.

Just put the completed card in a post box. You don't need a stamp.

- What was the course called? .....
- Where was it held? .....
- What did you think of the course? Was it:

  Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Average ☐ Poor ☐

  Your comments about the course .....

  .....

- Have you done another course since the computer taster course? Yes ☐ No ☐
- If yes, what was the course called? .....

Thank you

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